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**A FEW FIRST PRINCIPLES  
OF RELIGIOUS LIFE.**



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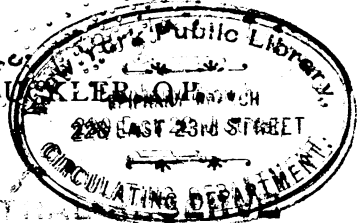
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# A FEW FIRST PRINCIPLES OF RELIGIOUS LIFE.

*A SPIRITUAL INSTRUCTION  
TO RELIGIOUS MEN AND WOMEN.*

BY

FR. H. REGINALD BUCKLER, O.F.M.



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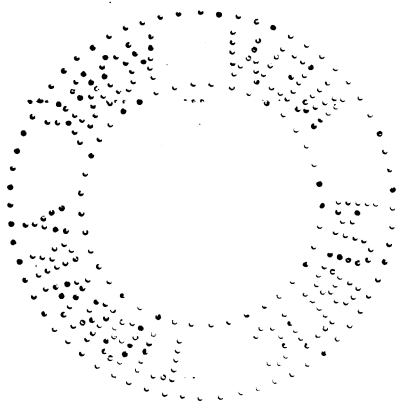
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## A FEW FIRST PRINCIPLES OF RELIGIOUS LIFE.

### Introduction.

RELIGIOUS men and women, who have left all things to dedicate themselves and their lives to the Divine love and service, and who wish with all their hearts to enjoy the spirit and sweetness of their state; not unfrequently find themselves, from one cause or another, deflecting from their early aims and ideals, and falling short of their first charity.

Perhaps they have not succeeded as yet in sufficiently forming the habit of interior life, which keeps a soul secure with God in the midst of things external, although indeed the state of grace itself is an interior life, comprising as it does the theological virtues, which make a soul the friend of God, known and loved by Him, and knowing, trusting, and loving Him in return, by Faith, Hope, and Charity. Were this life of grace and love between the soul and God more attended to and cultivated, it would soon bring with it an habitual sense of the presence of God, and the soul would easily learn to make His love the paramount influence in its life, and this, as the *Imitation* says, would "spur us on to great

things, and make all that is bitter sweet and savoury."\* If, however, this higher life be not sufficiently grasped, a soul of necessity falls back upon its own human spirit and natural activities, and the more these are exercised, the more they strengthen and develop ; and for the same reason the higher life weakens from want of use. The very analogies of nature will teach us this much. Artists, musicians, and men of science and business succeed well, and rise to eminence in their respective callings, because they give themselves heart and soul to the spirit of their state, and are continually exercising themselves in the works of their profession. Every power grows strong by use, and weakens by disuse ; as in nature so in grace. Consequently, if we neglect our higher powers, they serve us but little ; and if we use our lower powers, they soon strengthen, and before long get the upper hand, and become unmanageable.

Why should we not use the higher,—why not put them forth, cultivate and strengthen them, and even strive to perfect them ? Then by their means we might govern and utilize the lower, and make a better thing at once of nature and of grace. The children of the world are wiser than the children of light. They cultivate their nature, and we do not cultivate our grace. We have eyes, and see not, ears, and hear not, hands, and work not, feet, and walk not.

It may, however, sometimes happen that souls in religion heed but little their spiritual cultivation, because of their deficient knowledge of the work. So it was among the people of

\* B. I, C. 5.

God in the old law : " Therefore is My people led away captive, because they had not knowledge."\* We cannot hope to succeed in any work which we do not know. Let us learn again and again from the children of the world. Who would ever start the business of a farmer, without making it his first care to acquire the proper knowledge of his work? And who would profess himself a builder, and not become acquainted with every detail of constructive art, from the foundation to the summit? Or what soldier would enter on a campaign, not knowing the proper use of arms ; with little or no thought of the ways he had to move, the enemies he had to encounter, and the particular achievements to be accomplished ? So likewise, when we choose the profession of religious life, our care at the outset must be to know where we are, what is the main work to be done, and what the secondary and subsidiary works ; the difference between end and means, and the way to use the latter in reference to the former ; the difficulties we are likely to meet ; the desire and resolution necessary to undertake and accomplish our work. The knowing without the doing would be worse than useless ; for " he that heareth My words, and doth them not, shall be like to a foolish man who built his house on the sand." But the knowing is necessary for the doing : and those who both know and do are as the wise man who built his house upon a rock.

The following pages are meant to supply to Religious novices, in a brief and handy way, the first principles of religion, on which the details

\* *Isaias* v. 13.

of their daily actions and the duties of their future lives depend for that which is best in them all, viz., the inmost spirit of love, which gives the heart to God, and which, in the nature of the case, animates, governs, and gradually perfects the works of life. *Scrutans corda et renes Deus.*

Further, they are meant to remind us all, in a compendious way, that we should be men and women of the highest principle, that principle being the love of God governing our souls—moving us to the love of our neighbour, and applying itself practically and effectively to the works of daily life—thus leading us onward in a happy and united spirit, each in his allotted sphere devoted to the duties of his state and office, and working from the Divine principle in a thousand different ways.

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## Perfect Charity, the end of the Religious Life.

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“Ipsa perfectio caritatis est finis status Religionis.”

S. THOM. 2, 2, Q. 186, A. 2.

IT is no common grace to be chosen by our Divine Lord as His special friends, and to be associated with Him in His life of love for God and for men.

This is what the call to Religious life implies, if we see it in the light of Faith, and in its inmost spirit. God must be loved and served, and we must be all for Him, who is the Beginning and End of all. And then we labour, each one in his state and office, according to his abilities and opportunities, and the rules of sound discretion, to draw other souls to His knowledge, love, and service.

This life of love between the soul and God, extending itself to the love of one another, is ever to be considered as the essential constitutive of man's perfection, and consequently the principal end of the Religious life, according to the distinct teaching of the Angelic Doctor, grounded on the Inspired Word, and the teaching of the Fathers and Doctors from the beginning.

Accordingly, it follows that the main work of



our daily life must ever be the constant progress to our end, and our perfection, by the cultivation of the habit of Divine charity to God and to one another, affectively and effectively. From which may be seen how much we have to do, day by day, to maintain the general spirit of Religious life, the spirit of love to God and to our neighbour, which has to run through all the Religious Orders, both of men and women, and is equally the general end of them all.

In order to the formation of this interior life of love with God, all Religious men and women should, at the very outset of their career, voluntarily choose our Lord God as He chooses them, the Infinitely Great, the Infinitely Good, the Infinitely Wise, the Infinitely Powerful, the Infinitely Loving,—the Fountain of all that is great, good, and beautiful in eternity and time, in heaven and earth, in nature and grace, ever-flowing, over-flowing—and they should understand from the very first, that He is the Divine Father, Friend and Lover of their souls—that they are not asked to live without a father, a friend, or a lover—"All this and more is my Beloved to me." They must further know that this life of love between the soul and God is mutual. "He that loveth Me shall be loved of My Father: and I will love him, and manifest Myself to him."\* He loves us, and we love Him. He gives Himself to us, and we give ourselves to Him. He abides in us, and we abide in Him. He works with us, and we work with Him. He enjoys Himself with us, and we enjoy ourselves with Him.

\* S. John xiv. 21.

Thus it is that the Religious soul, responding to the Divine call, "gives all for all, and has all in all."\* It begins with love affective and effective. And it knows that the strengthening, development, and perfection of this love, affectively and effectively, is to be the main work of its life—that as the habit of love grows, the soul gets into closer contact with the Spirit of God, becoming "profitable to the Lord, prepared unto every good work."† For since God Himself is ever the first and principal mover—*Deus est agens principale*—so we must be in close union with Him if we wish to succeed in our external works. Without this we shall work in the human spirit, and so be mingling our miseries with Divine things. And who shall say what harm we do then to the work of God, of the Church, and of souls?

For the accomplishment of this general end of Religion, viz., the formation of the habit of perfect charity to God and to our neighbour, on which all the details of daily life depend for their perfection, we shall have to proceed just as we proceed in the formation of natural habits, such as music, art, language, business, and the rest. We must awaken our interest in the work, we must give mind and heart to it, we must set ourselves to learn and to do it—God looking to us, and we looking to Him—He working with us, and we working with Him: for "without Me you can do nothing."—S. John xv. 5.

Repetition of act gradually forms habit; and the habit being formed becomes the spring and principle of fresh action. All this is the law at once of nature and of grace.

\* Imit. B. 3, C. 5.

† 2 Tim. ii. 21.

It becomes necessary to remember, in the formation of this habit of love, the due relation of the love of God to the love of the creature. The love of God is always our sovereign love : and every creature love has to be in subordination to it. In order to get to this, we leave the world and creatures behind us, and give ourselves wholly to God in Religion. For a fair time, in the early years of Religious life, we study detachment, by withdrawing our thoughts and affections from things we naturally love, in order to give Divine love the ascendancy within us. This helps us to form the contemplative element, and the habit and spirit of interior prayer. It teaches us to prefer God before all, and to stand and see that none can be compared with Him. Gradually we learn that He is the only good, and the Fountain of all goodness : that creatures are not good, but the recipients of His goodness. "None is good but God alone."\* Then all the goodness in the creature is seen to be of God, and we are thus able to love the creature rightly. We see, admire, and love God, not only in Himself, but in His creatures also. Then we may return, with a new and divine principle, to God's dear creatures, seeing and loving the Divine presence and gifts in them, and labouring to bring them all to Him.† Thus we love the beauties of nature and grace : and creatures then do not turn us from God, but rather lead us to Him.

We are reminded here of our Lord, who,

\* S. Luke xviii. 19.

† "This is My commandment, that you love one another, as I have loved you."—S. John xv. 12.

being in the form of God, emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant. That is, from the inmost contemplative life of Divine love, He came upon earth to the active life, and from the love of the Eternal Creator descended to the love of the creature. So likewise, in imitation of the perfect God and perfect Man, let us first of all attain to the "form of God" by a life of interior love and union with Him; then we may leave for a while our contemplative repose, and overflow in love to our neighbour, thus loving God first in Himself, then in His creatures, so passing from the Uncreated Love to created love; all for God's own great ends, and the vast needs of souls.

In all this, the four signs of the true love of friendship have to be constantly borne in mind, and they apply equally to the love of God, and the love of our neighbour.

1. Not to offend the one we love.
2. To enjoy the presence of the one we love.
3. To do the will of the one we love.
4. To sacrifice ourselves for the one we love.

Further, we ought certainly to acquire the *spirit* of our state: that is, we ought to love our state of life—love its duties—love to do them—and do them well. Look at the children of the world. Artists, musicians, men of science and business love their profession. Their heart is in their work; and so they succeed, and get on to eminence and perfection. Are we to be less interested and hearty in Divine things than they are in passing and perishable gratifications? Yet, is it not true that our thoughts and affections

easily wander away from the main purpose of our vocation, and get engaged and entangled with things merely natural and mundane?

When we first enter Religion, we should make a full oblation of ourselves and our future life to God. O God, Thou art the One, Great, and only Good, and the Fountain of all goodness. I choose Thee this day as my Father, my Friend, and the Divine Lover of my soul: and I dedicate my life to Thy love and service. I wish to do all for the love of Thee, and the love of my fellow-creatures, according to Thy Will, in union with Jesus in His life on earth, and in the Blessed Sacrament, with Mary, and all the Angels and Saints. Thou Thyself art the principal Worker in all, yet Thou willest that we work with Thee. Sweet privilege of the creature, to live and work with the Creator among His wonderful works here below—O God—and I do all for Thine own great ends, and the vast needs of souls.

After this oblation, let us seize upon the Divine habit of Charity within the soul, remembering that it is at once the bond of union with God, and the principle of spiritual and supernatural action. Throughout our lives now we must aim at keeping to this one Divine moving principle. By the law of nature it strengthens with use and exercise, and weakens by neglect and disuse, and this is why it has to be kept to, if our progress to perfection is to be maintained. As it moves and acts, day by day, and hour by hour, it gives the continual repetition of act that is needed to form the habit, the habit of all habits, that of Divine Charity uniting with God, and spiritualiz-



ing and perfecting the soul, and all the ordinary works of life.

At first we are as weak beginners, like those beginning any art or science. We proceed with difficulty. But by care and application the difficulties diminish, and in time are overcome. Before long, what was difficult becomes easy, and we work with readiness and delight. So it is in nature ; so let it be in grace.

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## **Means for attaining the end of Perfect Charity.**

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1. THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD AND OF SELF.
  2. PRAYER AND MORTIFICATION.
  3. THE VOWS.
  4. THE RULES.
  5. THE WORKS OF DAILY LIFE.
- 

### I.

#### **The Knowledge of God and of Self.**

AS we cannot love what we do not know, so if we are to live the life of love with God, much will depend upon our forming and constantly maintaining great ideas of His wonderful Being, attributes, and workings. We are drawn irresistibly and necessarily to the love of creatures, yet they are but effects flowing from the beauteous Primal Cause of all things. The starry heavens! O their inconceivable beauty! their immeasurable distance, and the magnitude of their shining orbs! The glowing sun! so astonishing in its size and power!\* The loftiness and elegance of mountain ranges, and all

\* Astronomy tells us that all the stars are suns, and our sun but a star amid the others,—that the sun's diameter

their lovely foregrounds, surroundings, snowy peaks, and glaciers, rocks, precipices, forests, cataracts, rich flowery woods, smiling valleys, and flowing rivers,—they all speak the wonders of Divine wisdom, power, and love. They fascinate us with their beauty ; and they point to the Source of all beauty. Can we not thus train ourselves a little to the knowledge of God? Might we not nourish the contemplative habit, by seeing the Creator in the wonderful works of His Hand? The Saints loved to do it. S. Francis of Assisi “rejoiced in all the works of God’s Hands, and by the glory and beauty of that mirror he rose to the principle and cause of them all. In all things fair he beheld Him who is most fair ; finding the way to the Beloved by His Footsteps in created things. With unspeakable devotion he enjoyed that Fountain of Goodness, flowing forth through all creatures, as in so many streams.”\* The Psalmist overflows with joy in the contemplation of God’s wonderful works. “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth the works of His Hands” : “How great are Thy works, O Lord, Thou hast made all things in wisdom ;

is over 800,000 miles, the earth’s being about 8,000 ;—that the distance of the stars from our earth ranges from twenty billions of miles to one hundred billions and more, one billion being a million million. If the stars are all suns, it would seem from analogy that they, like our solar system, have their systems of planets or worlds around them, the central sun being the tremendous attractive force keeping them all in their respective orbits around herself. What an idea of the power and immensity of creation, and of the Creator it gives us !

\* S. Bonav., Vit. S. Fran., C. 9.

the whole earth is filled with Thy greatness."  
"I will muse on the works of Thy Hands."

It would seem to be easy and natural to rise from effect to cause, and from the enjoyment of the creature to pass to the knowledge and love of the Creator. We are drawn to love dear relatives and friends. We admire the powers of human intellect; and the height, length, breadth, and depth of human love. Knowledge is alluring; science enchanting; art most delightful; the society of kindred spirits full of sweet enjoyment. In the smallest details of creation, the Creator seems to be as wonderful and beautiful as in His vast majestic works. The lovely flowers and fruits, the rich woods and stately trees, so wondrous in their life, so varied in their forms, so exquisite in their qualities, so prolific in their reproduction,—the immense resources of the earth,—the inventive and constructive power of man, amidst the works of God,—all speak the wisdom, power, and love of Him who made them. "He hath made us, and not we ourselves." Thus it is that the Creator may be known by the things He has made, and souls be led onwards in the ways of His love and service. And "love is a light, burning and shining. When it burns in the heart, it shines in the understanding,"\* and we soon begin to conceive of God as the Infinitely Great, the Infinitely Wise, the Infinitely Beautiful, the Infinitely Powerful, the Infinitely Loving and Lovely,—the Fountain of all Goodness in eternity and time, in heaven and earth, in nature and grace, ever-flowing, overflowing; and not content with pouring upon us

\* Card. Bona, "Via Compend.," C. 9.

all around His riches in the wondrous works of His hand, He takes hold of our nature and lifts it to Himself, coming down upon earth as the Perfect God and Perfect Man, and giving to us in His own Person and Human Nature, the model of a perfect life, that thus in union with Himself we may become sharers in His Divine life, light, love, and happiness, by grace in this life, and by glory in the next. Living on earth His hidden, active, suffering, glorified Life, He becomes our pattern in all. By His resurrection from the dead He gives a sure foundation to our faith in His Divinity, and all His Divine teaching; and leaving on earth His Church as the representative of His Divine presence and authority, to whom He commits the truths of His revelation and the fountains of His grace, to be communicated to the minds and hearts of men, in all future generations, we thus see Him, have Him, enjoy Him, as the Divine Teacher, Guide, Friend, Father, and Lover of our Souls. "You shall draw water with joy from the fountains of the Saviour." The Sacraments of the Church, one and all, are the fountains of our Lord's grace poured upon our souls;—above all, the Sacrament of His love in the Holy Eucharist, the gift of Himself and of His Incarnation perpetuated in the world till the end, whereby we are ever enjoying Him by His hidden presence in the tabernacle, as our daily oblation in Holy Mass for God's own great ends, and the vast needs of souls, and as the food of our souls in Holy Communion. In the Sacrament of Penance, He is ever there, ready to receive poor erring, wounded, dying, and even dead souls,—

ready to raise them from death to life, comfort them, heal them, strengthen them, and lead them onwards and upwards in the ways of grace and perfection. Then, all the holy influences of the Church are ever around and about us from life's commencement to its end,—in her doctrines, her traditions, her sacraments, her devotions, in the Holy Scriptures, in the writings of the Fathers and Doctors, in the lives of her Saints, in the sweet society of cultured, kindred, loving souls; with abilities and opportunities through life of co-operating with God and with the Church in the Divine interests here below, and drawing other souls in so many ways, directly or indirectly, to the knowledge, love, and service of God, thus helping, each in his own sphere and degree, in the spread of our Lord's kingdom upon earth.

In our considerations of the Divine Immensity and Infinity, desiring as we should to grow more and more in the knowledge and love of God, we may think of the Ineffable Wisdom and Goodness, sometimes in one way, sometimes in another, with the greatest liberty of spirit, each one following his own drawings, and being persuaded that there is always more to know, more to love, and more to do.

To aid us in all this, let us cultivate the greatest devotion to each Person of the Holy Trinity. As we look up to the Eternal Father, let us love to think of Him as the Fountain of all Beauty and Goodness, in eternity and time, heaven and earth, nature and grace; and let creatures be as so many streams from the ever-flowing, over-flowing Fountain, reflecting the

wisdom, beauty, power, and loveliness of the Creator. Thus we see God beautiful in Himself, and beautiful in His creatures; we may then contemplate and love Him in Himself, and contemplate and love Him in His creatures: ever keeping the love of the creature in subordination to the love of the Creator: and being careful never to separate the good from its source.

The Second Person of the Blessed Trinity is ever before us as the Perfect God, and Perfect Man, coming down from Heaven to give Himself to us whole and undivided—the loving Friend of humanity, the representative of our race—born of a Virgin mother, that the manhood and womanhood of our nature might stand once more in all their dignity and beauty before God. In our Divine Lord we see the perfect and the model man; in our Blessed Lady the perfect and the model woman. There is the hidden, humble, homely life at Nazareth, to teach all, however holy and learned they may be, the duty of obedience and subjection to those placed over them by God—to tell us that we are here not to do our own will, but God's will, that obedience to those over us gives us God's will to be done—to let us know that the true greatness, value, and merit of life here below is rather from its inner spirit, than from any seeming magnitude of external works.

From the hidden life our Lord passes in due time to the active, which tells us that when our time comes we are to leave contemplation for action and show our love for God by the service of our neighbour. And "Charity even then

risers on high when it descends low ; and as it descends to the lowest it rises to the highest."\* We see our Lord as the perfect man, who came "not to be ministered unto, but to minister," giving Himself to the needs of those around Him, spiritual and temporal ; and providing for the transmission of His truth and grace to the souls of men, by the formation of His Church, representing His Divine Presence and authority in the world till the end of time. But God becomes human, that man may become Divine. Hence the Divine teaching power of the Church to keep him ever in the way of God ; and the fountains of grace upon his soul in the Holy Sacraments, that all may be justified, purified, sanctified, and perfected through their association with, and conformity to, the Model and Perfect Man.

Our Lord then enters on His suffering life, taking the sins of the world upon Himself, so becoming the representative sinner, and the Man of sorrows, that sin might be struck, atoned for, and destroyed in Him. The grievousness of our Lord's sufferings teaches us the grievousness of sin, and moves us to contrition, penance, detestation of sin, and the acceptance of our share of suffering here below, that we may be conformed in all to the Divine Model, and be brought into full subjection to the Divine Will. And although we may not love suffering, we may love to endure it, as bringing us the Divine Will, and subduing us to the love of God by the sacrifice of self.

The Holy Ghost is the Spirit of Love in God

\* S. Greg., *Past.*, P. 2, C. 5.



Himself, and the life-giving, sanctifying, and perfecting principle of spiritual life in our own souls. Reaching "from end to end mightily, and ordering all things sweetly," He governs us according to our nature, moving us through love freely, easily, and delectably. "The Charity of God is poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, who is given to us."\* As therefore Charity is Divine love, and the Holy Ghost the Divine Spirit of Love, it follows that the soul is in contact with the Spirit of God, by Charity, and is governed by the Holy Spirit through the habit of Created Charity.†

But as grace does not destroy nature, so the Divine Spirit does not extinguish the human spirit. But grace governs nature, and the Spirit of God governs the spirit of man : and here lies the whole work of a spiritual life, in the bringing of the human powers, faculties, senses, and members under the influence and governance of the Spirit of God. The Church has been governed by the Holy Ghost since the day of Pentecost. Still, the Church's Divine Element does not destroy her human element. We see, indeed, in the history of the Church, and in her daily life among us still, how strong her human element is, since no one is constrained to holiness against his will. So it is, and so it will be. But the more the human spirit is subdued to the Divine Spirit—the more it is governed and moved thereby, the better it will be for itself, and for the Church and for Society too.

\* Rom. v. 5.

† Mediante habitu caritatis. S. Thom., 2, 2, Q. 23, Art. 2.

As the knowledge of God shows us the Divine Immensity and Infinity, and tells us that all creatures have gone forth from Him, and belong to Him, we are thus moved to see, admire, and love God in all around and within us, fully realizing that creatures have nothing good of their own, but that all that is good, attractive, and lovely in them is of God, and belongs strictly to Him.\* This being so, we are soon brought to admit the truth of our own nothingness, which lays a sure foundation for humility, that necessary and indispensable quality of soul, on which the whole life of Divine Charity has for ever to rest.

We thus see that the knowledge of God leads us directly to the knowledge of ourselves ; since if He is all in all, we must be brought to nothing. Yet good we have, in nature and in grace, and rich we are in gifts and graces. But the point is, they are God's goods, gifts, and graces ; in us, but not of us. Freely let them be praised, admired, and loved by others. It is no part of humility to deny they are in us. But it is humility to attribute them to God, and to keep them safe for Him.

From the knowledge of God, and the seeing of His beauty, power, and loveliness in all around and within us, we are spurred on to love Him more and more ; and the more we know, the more we love, and the easier it is to love. On the other hand, the intimate knowledge of our nothingness leads us to the sacrifice and renunciation of ourselves, that necessary disposition of Christian, religious, and spiritual life, which

\* "None is good but God alone." S. Luke xviii. 19.

paves the way for so many choice gifts of Divine light and love, which God bestows there where He finds the vessel empty; and which have so much to do with our state of soul before Him, our usefulness in His hands, and the success of our labours for the souls of others. Thus let God be seen and loved in all His creatures, in nature and in grace. As in the beauties of nature we see the outpourings of the Divine presence, wisdom, and love, so let it be in the souls of men, and our own souls too, viz., that everything good there is God's, and nothingness, misery, and sin belong to ourselves. We are neither praised nor loved for this. We humble ourselves for it. Thus, humility is truth; and pride is a lie and a robbery.

This is humility of the *mind*, and it is the groundwork of Charity's life, and Charity rests thereon, as the building rests on the foundation.

From this humility of mind we proceed to humility of heart, which moves us ever to be humble before God, being well content with our littleness and nothingness, that He may be our all; and which further moves us to be humble before others when the right occasions come. Then it is, when we are humbled, that we have to act upon our humility of mind, and humble what is *of ourself* in us, to what is *of God* in the other.\*

It is thus seen that this twofold knowledge—the knowledge of God and the knowledge of ourselves, helps gradually to breed and form within us the two blessed habits of humility and charity, humility forming the safe founda-

\* S. Thom., 2, 2, Q. 161, Art. iii.

tion for charity—humility the groundwork, and charity the life-long work. And as this is a compendium of all spiritual life, it shows how necessary to us is the twofold knowledge of God and of self; for from knowing the greatness and goodness of God, we are moved to love Him, serve Him, and dedicate ourselves to Him; and from knowing our own littleness and misery, we are moved to humble and renounce ourselves—and as these habits of humility and charity grow, strengthen, and develop within us, our whole spiritual life grows, strengthens, and develops, and thus the soul goes on to its perfection.

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## II.

### **Prayer and Mortification.**

Charity, grounded on humility—uniting the soul with God—and governing all the works of life\*—gets to its perfection only gradually, like the full-blown rose, which only unfolds itself little by little. As the habit is cultivated and exercised, day by day, affectively and effectively, it strengthens by use, bringing nature into sweet accordance with grace, both going hand in hand together in the love and service of God and of our neighbour.

It is well known that for the development of this Divine habit, two instrumental means are

\*“*Caritas in quantum ordinat hominem ad ultimum finem, est principium omnium bonorum operum quæ in finem ultimum ordinari possunt.*” St. Thom., 1, 2, Q. 65, Art. 3.

absolutely necessary, and altogether indispensable, viz.: Prayer and Mortification. The nature of the work demands these both in conjunction together; for the work of our perfection is a process gradually wrought within us by the *increase* of Divine love, and the *decrease* of self-love. "He must increase, but I must decrease."\* Now it is by prayer that Charity increases, and by mortification that self-love diminishes. Prayer lifts the spirit up, and mortification puts the flesh down. Hence, Prayer and Mortification are to be Charity's inseparable attendants, as handmaids accompanying their Queen; and both have to grow continually in perfection till the end of our lives,

As then every good Religious must be loving to God and to his neighbour by the life of Charity, affective and effective, so he must be a man of prayer, and a man of mortification. And as he cultivates the life of love, by living and working from its principle in all the works of daily life, so, to do this successfully, he will need the daily help of prayer and mortification, the one to engage him constantly with God, the other to free him continually from himself.†

It only needs a loving soul to make a man of prayer. What is prayer but an intercourse between the soul and God, the soul bringing itself to the Divine Presence, looking to God, loving, speaking to Him, listening to His Voice, and receiving from Him new inpourings of His light and love?

\* S. John iii. 30.

† Si adhærebis superiori, conculcabis inferiora. S. Aug., Enar. in Ps. xlv.

The *mode* of this intercommunion between the soul and God will differ according to the dispositions and abilities of different souls. There are beginners, proficient, and those that are perfect in spiritual life. So, there are three kinds of mental prayer suitable to these three states of soul: meditation for beginners, affective prayer for proficient, contemplation for the perfect. All this, however, is more or less technical. For beginners, more especially when they are pure of soul, and loving towards God, may often pass into affective prayer, or contemplative acts, without having yet attained to the corresponding habit. And those enjoying the prayer of contemplation may often deteriorate, if they are not careful, and faithful to God, and so find the need of reverting to affective acts and meditation. But in one way or in another, the loving soul, aspiring to perfection, in the nature of the case, will feel the need of looking to God, thinking of Him, speaking to Him, listening to Him, loving Him, getting nearer to Him, giving itself to Him, breaking forth in praise, love, oblation, and petition to Him—thus giving its little “all” to get to His Divine “all.” This is prayer, Mental or Vocal, Affective or Contemplative, as the case may be.

Beginners will generally need books and methods to teach and train them thus to fix their minds and hearts on God and Divine things. But as the soul progresses in its life of love, it is drawn onwards and upwards to God, and opens itself more and more to Him. Its methods change. God Himself works within the loving soul. “Draw nigh to God, and He will

draw nigh to you." \* Thus, great freedom must be left to souls in the way of prayer, seeing that the soul of man is the kingdom of God, † and our Lord's "homeliest home" upon earth. Does He not stand at the door and knock, asking us to open to Him, that He may dwell with us, and deal with us, on terms of friendship? "Behold I stand at the door and knock. If any one will hear My voice, and open to Me the door, I will come in to him, and sup with him, and he with Me." ‡ As in the natural order, friends know more and more of one another, and so grow in mutual love, and then communicate together easily and lovingly, without any need of formalities, so also in the life of Divine Love, God and the soul are friends together, and as we draw near to Him, He draws near to us—as we love Him, He loves us—and as we give ourselves to Him, He gives Himself to us. It is clear from this, that as a soul progresses in the way of love, it progresses also in the way of prayer.

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So also it should be in the way of mortification, taking mortification now in its primary sense, as the renunciation of selfish love, the antagonistic principle in the soul to Divine Charity. No doubt all vices and moral imperfections are rooted in self-love, as S. Thomas teaches—"Self-love is the cause of all sin." §

\* S. James iv. 8.

† "The kingdom of God is within you."

‡ Apoc. iii. 20.

§ "Amor sui est causa omnis peccati."—1, 2, Q. 77, Art. iv.

The whole secret of a practical spiritual life lies here, in the gradual substitution of the Divine for the self-moving principle, in yielding the activity of the human spirit, that the Spirit of God may govern all our movements. "They who are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." \* "He must increase, but I must decrease." † "The more thou dost empty thy heart of that which is thine own, the more abundantly will I fill it with that which is Mine." ‡

A secret in the practice of mortification must be taken in at the outset of our work, which is, that Divine Love, or Charity itself, is the mortifying principle. This is one of the happy results of making the Divine love of charity our beginning, as well as our end, in spiritual life. "Caritas est principium," says S. Thomas, who also says "caritas est finis." § By seizing upon the Divine principle from the first, it engages the heart with such love as to make it a fairly easy and practical matter to put down, or mortify self-love, the root of all our faults. And the axe being laid to the root, all comes down, and the denial of our own wills and ways is not so hard when the Divine love is there, to supplant our natural love.

From this it will be seen that in the exercise of mortification we need not dive over much into our miseries, nor keep up a fretful scrutiny of our many faults and shortcomings, which might

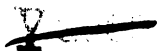
\* Rom. viii. 14.

† S. John iii. 30.

‡ S. Cath. Sen., Dialog. on Perf.

§ S. Thom., 1, 2, Q. 65, Art. 3, and 2, 2, Q. 23, Art. 8 ad 3, and 2 Sent. Dist. 38, Q. 1, A. 1 and A. 2 ad 5.





easily breed habits of fear and scrupulosity and keep the soul groping in its "mournful lurking holes," thus hindering it from rising to the light of Divine contemplation. Charity, looking straight to the end, sees the obstacles between itself and the end, as a man, looking at a distant tower, sees all that stands between himself and the tower. Thus, the Divine virtue, intent on gaining the end, sets itself to demolish all the impediments standing in its way to the end. This is the exercise of mortification, and charity is thus seen to be the mortifying principle.

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III.

**The Vows.**

Those who dedicate themselves to God in the religious life do not thereby change the end of their creation. That remains for ever the same, in every state of life. Union with God is the common end of all : and charity, as the mutual love between the soul and God, is the only bond of union. As therefore charity unites with God, even in this life, so the perfect union with God in the future life is attained by perfect charity. Consequently, it is perfect charity that brings us at once to our end and our perfection. What the religious life does for us, over and above the Christian life, is to supply us with the perfect means for gaining the end, binding us through life here below to the use of these means. This is why it is called a state of perfection ; because it binds us always to tend to perfect charity, and

gives us the perfect means for doing so. These means are found in the three vows of the religious life, which are instrumental to perfect charity, by removing from the soul three distinct impediments thereto. These impediments to perfect charity are :

1. The love of earthly possessions.
2. The love of carnal pleasures.
3. The love of our own will.

The vow of poverty removes the impediments to perfect charity which arise from affection to external things.

The vow of chastity removes the impediments to perfect charity which arise from fleshly pleasures and creature loves.

The vow of obedience removes the impediments to perfect charity which arise from our own self-will.

In this way we see how the three vows are means to the end—or, in other words, the instruments to perfect charity. This is the distinct and repeated teaching of the Angelic Doctor.\*

We all know how the view of the end, and the constant desire to attain it, moves any one to use the proper means thereto. An artizan, bent on producing a richly-adorned cabinet, must have his hammer, chisel, nails, and all other needful tools. A scholar wants his books and masters ; a husbandman his plough and horses ; a housewife her needle and thread. It is the

\* "Patet quod consilia ad vitæ perfectionem pertinent, non quia in eis principaliter consistit perfectio, sed quia sunt via quædam vel instrumenta ad perfectionem caritatis habendam." Opusc., "Cont. Retrah.," 6.

same with us in Religion. Our work is the formation of perfect charity to God and to our neighbour ; and for this work the vows are the instruments in hand. Let every Religious, therefore, see that he uses his vows in reference to this end.

The view of this most desirable of all ends will constantly show him the need of, and spur him on to the practice of, poverty and detachment of spirit. For his great aim is to have his heart free for the life of love with God. But how can he be free if he is held by affections for, and attachments to, the things of earth ? How will an eagle fly if its foot be chained ? "Behold we have left all things, and followed Thee." Let them all go. By a single stroke the vow of poverty cuts them away from the soul. How freely now the soul, disengaged from things of earth, turns to the Divine Lover ! And as its work is to progress in love, so, day by day, it keeps itself poor—"poor in things, but poorer still in affection to things."\* Thus it is that poverty is instrumental to perfect charity ; and we practise it in all its details, that by its help the soul may go on and on, day by day, more and more, to perfect love. For as we are set on gaining the end, so we are set on using the means. If we deflect from the practice of poverty, we thereby deflect from the way to the end.

But when external possessions are given up for whole-hearted love, fleshly love is there to engage the soul. Here comes in the vow of chastity, and all for the same end, to clear the

\* Blossius, Spec. Monach. C. de Mortif.

heart's affections of lower love—to remove the hindrances to the Divine light and love that rise from fleshly passion—that the heart being thus free and empty, the Divine Lover may Himself engage it, and gradually purify, illuminate, and perfect it. Thus chastity is seen as instrumental to the main work of our perfection by perfect charity. Nor is it hard to part with human loves and lovers, to gain the Divine Love and the Divine Lover.

But even with poverty and chastity, God's love within cannot get full possession of the soul, as long as self-will is the manager of things. The soul, therefore, bent on getting to perfect charity, finds it necessary to remove the impediments thereto, arising from its own self-moving principle. As long as it moves even to good things by self-love and self-will, it moves not by love to God. And therefore its charity is far from perfection. A change of principle is needed. Obedience it is that supplies this change, by giving us the will of God to be done. And therefore the loving soul takes it as its third vow, by which to clear away the remaining hindrances to perfect love, arising so plentifully from its own natural will and selfish love.

As the civil power is from God, so is the spiritual power. Hence we yield our obedience to every rightly-constituted superior, both in the temporal and the spiritual order, since the Divine authority is represented in both.

Thus, in Religious life, the local superior represents the higher superior, such as the Provincial or General of the Order. The General represents the Holy Father, and the

Holy Father our Lord's own presence and authority.

This is why our vow of obedience is taken directly to God Himself—*Promitto Obedientiam Deo*—the living superiors representing the Divine authority. This it is that gives us in Religion the ever-priceless assurance that every obedience to rule and the living Superior is the distinct fulfilment of the Divine will—and this doing of the Divine will is a direct exercise of Divine Charity, which ever moves us to do the will of the Beloved. And as in Religion we are moving from obedience every hour of the day, we see how the Divine will and love are thus brought directly to the soul, giving to us the divinely-appointed means of progressing day by day in the life of Charity, which always remains the essential perfection of the soul.

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#### IV.

### The Rules.

Over and above the vows, which appertain to religious life in general, each Order holds certain other instrumental means of perfection in hand, in the rules proper to its own Institute.

Let it be well remembered at the outset, that these rules are, in addition to the three vows, the divinely-appointed means for helping the soul onwards, day by day, to its life of perfect charity.

We have seen how the three vows serve their purpose as means to this end, by removing three

sets of impediments thereto. Now, the rules, as S. Thomas tells us, are arranged in order to help us effectually to the keeping of our vows. Thus the vows and the rules are all meant to serve the main purpose of helping us on to the life of perfect love with God and with our neighbour.\* Who, that lives in Religion, will not feel the truth of this? "Thou art called a Religious," says Blossius. "See that thou art truly what thou art called."

We all know the difference between the profession of a religious life and the practice of it. We make our profession; we have the habit and the tonsure; we live in a religious house; we are called in name after the Order we profess; we follow the daily routine of the house. But are we inwardly and practically true religious men and women?

The meaning of the word religious is "bound again": that is, bound again to God. A Christian is bound to God, by faith, hope, and charity. A Religious is bound again to Him by the bond of special love, by which He, the Divine Friend, Father, and Lover, lives a life of friendship and union with the soul of His choice; and this, by the additional triple bond of the three vows—and these well secured by the daily observances of regular life.

All this being understood, why should we not give ourselves, heart and soul, to the duties of our profession? Much will depend upon our

\* "Votum religionis ordinatur sicut in finem ad perfectionem caritatis: et omnes aliæ Religionum observantiæ ordinantur ad tria vota." S. Thom., 2, 2, Q. 186, Art. 7 ad 1 & 2.

keeping the main work steadily in view. The children of the world do all this in the business of life. Their main work is clearly before them. They want position, science, art, or gain : they know the means to the end, and know how to use them thereto ; and right well do they use them. Reason, instinct, tell them to do it. Why are we not as wise in spirituals as they are in temporals ? Our end is union with God by perfect love. Our means to this end, the vows and rules. Do we love our poverty, chastity, and obedience ? Do we love our rules ? And are we, by their means, constantly progressing towards the life of perfect love with God ? The plan is simple enough ; it just requires that amount of earnestness that people of the world give to their temporal concerns.

Who, then, will be found to say, 'The rules are small—and not binding under sin' ?

Small, perhaps, just considered in themselves. But the point is, they are means to the great end—means, too, given us by the Church, representing our Lord's authority and will—and when carried out in view to perfect love, they assuredly become, every one of them, distinct acts of love, gradually forming the corresponding habit. And, after all, the spiritual life is the formation of a habit, and the habit of love is formed by its acts. Each act may be small : but the repetition of acts makes the habit, and the habit makes the character.

Therefore let us mind what we are about. In Divine things nothing is small. The value is from the Spirit of God, and from the progress to the end. God does not regard just how much

we do, but with how much love we do it. He does much, who loves much; as the "Imitation" says.\*

And as to rules not binding under sin, there is a little theology there—*per se* they do not bind under sin; but *per accidens* sin easily attaches to the breakage of rule: *e.g.*, neglect of duty, contempt, disedification, culpable ignorance, tepidity, &c. However, is it not enough to say that the rules give us God's will to be done, and become the repetitions of act to the formation of the habit? Tell a merchant that it is no sin if he neglect to pick up gold on his way. His instinct to his end is enough. He wants no refinement of reasoning. He knows his work, and takes the means to do it.

So with a good Religious. He knows the rules lead him on to perfect love. This is his business. With him the question of sin is not there. It is a matter of getting to the end by using the means.

Sometimes, however, according to the dictates of sound discretion, many a rule will give way before some higher law. For it is well admitted, both in nature and in grace, that a higher law prevails over a lower one. Then, Love's own large views at once serve their purpose. Natural law is higher than positive law. Thus, when nature's demands are present, positive and particular rules give way. In the things of grace also, it is very frequently part of discretion to let some particular rule yield before a higher consideration, reduced to charity, which is the higher law prevailing over the lower. To do

\* B. I., C. 15.



otherwise would be manifestly out of order, and against the law of right reason. Hence, "the letter killeth," and the good Spirit it is that quickens us to the act of discretion.

But in the absence of any higher law, the positive law of the rule is in possession ; and remains as an appointed means to the end we have chosen.

In all this let us see that the children of light are not less wise than the children of the world.

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V.

### **The Works of Daily Life.**

"If you know these things, you shall be blessed if you do them."\* Knowledge is quite indispensable to practice. If a man were to say, 'I will be a lawyer—a physician—a builder—a farmer'—and yet knew nothing of these things, he would be a foolish man for attempting to do what he did not know. So, if we are to succeed in a religious and spiritual life, we must know what the business is, and how to accomplish it.

It does not, however, follow that because we know a work, we do it. Knowledge gives us the theory, and so paves the way to practice. Yet how easy it is to know the thing and not do it. Hence, "be ye doers of the law, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves." Therefore, while knowledge is excellent and necessary, it is not sufficient. Let us love to know, and let us know well and clearly ; because knowledge

\* S. John xiii. 17.

perfects the intellect. Still, the fact remains, it shows the way, it does not go the way.

Our principles must be applied to our daily life and actions, lest we be theoretical instead of practical. It is the unanimous teaching of philosophers and divines that the perfection of the virtues is found in their *acts*, not in the habit.\* The musical habit may be well formed in a musician; but as long as it lies dormant, it is but the musical power, and not music itself. It is only when the power comes into play that the perfection of the art is enjoyed. So it is with all our other powers. Every power is for its proper work: † and the perfection of the power is not enjoyed until it passes from habit into act; because the habit was made for action, and if it is not used, it is as a talent buried in a napkin.

On all this is based the well-known teaching of spiritual writers, that perfection is found in ordinary actions. They do not say ordinary habits, but ordinary actions. But the actions presuppose the habits; as the actual enjoyment of music presupposes the musical habit or power. And therefore, as it is in nature, so it is in grace. If we want our lives spiritualizing and supernaturalizing by the constant flow of loving acts to God and to our neighbour, we have to cultivate and strengthen the habit or quality of Divine charity which is in germ within us, and so to bring it on to its perfection as a habit, by use and exercise, that it may come forth into action, promptly, easily, and sweetly in all the works of

\* Unumquodque intantum perfectum est, inquantum est actu.

† Quaelibet potentia est propter suam operationem.

our daily life ; for if it were to come forth only with difficulty, it would show that the habit is not fully developed or perfect, just as a musician, playing with difficulty instead of with readiness and delight, would at once be seen to be, as yet, no adept at his art.

All this would not seem to be a difficult undertaking if we trained ourselves to it from early years. The secret is, that the habit is there within us, only waiting for use and exercise ; and yet, we fall upon nature's habits instead—get quite accustomed to use them ; and so we develop natural instead of spiritual qualities. Do we not know that the theological virtues are implanted in us with the baptismal grace ? More or less they have worked, and work within us ; and as they work, they strengthen : but if they are not sufficiently used, they lie dormant, and do but partially serve us. Meanwhile, natural and imperfect habits, from being in constant use through life, quickly settle into second nature, the higher and Divine habits waning from neglect.

Our aim therefore must be to seize upon the Divine principle of love, which is the habit of charity in the soul, and apply it to all the ordinary works of daily life, that it may vivify them with God's own life and love. The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed. So, our beginnings in the life of love with God are but small and weak. But with care, attention, and cultivation, the good seed grows, strengthens, and springs into life, sending forth its branches, and bearing fruits in all sweetness and abundance. How careful we must be that the life of love,

planted within us by the baptismal grace, be not choked and stunted in its growth by the noxious weeds and thorns of selfish earthly loves. By attending to lower loves, they strengthen, and by neglecting the higher love, it weakens.

Our work, then, is to use the higher principle within us, and to let it govern the natural man. Will it not make life much brighter, sweeter, happier, more meritorious, to begin at once, and endeavour to work in all the works of daily life by the Divine principle? What can be simpler and easier? Let us offer ourselves anew to God, to be all for Him—let us offer all our future life to Him—the works and trials of daily life, in union with our Lord, our Lady, and all the Saints—all for God's own great ends, and the vast needs of souls. Let us remember our Lord God as our Friend, Father, and Lover. We live together, and work together—God in us, and we in Him. The love of God and of our neighbour must be to our souls as the spring to the watch—setting all going, and keeping all going. The natural self-moving principle will have to be mortified by the higher love as soon as it asserts itself. Little by little it is brought under the sway of the Divine life; and after a time nature and grace go hand in hand together; crying out with the Psalmist, "My heart and my flesh have rejoiced in the living God."

PROVIDED THE SOUL LIVES THE LIFE OF LOVE  
WITH GOD, THE MODE OF ITS EMPLOYMENT  
IS BUT AN ACCIDENT.

This is a golden principle, bringing the most solid contentment and consolation to a loving soul.

Why should we pine after accidents? The doing of the Divine Will is amply enough for every one of us. Obedience gives us the Divine Will. We have it in religion all day long. S. Gregory and S. Thomas tell us that a small action done with great love is better than a great action done with small love: because God regards the heart.\* And the author of the "Imitation" says the same.† What a happy privilege we enjoy in Religion of finding the Divine Will all day long. What we want is the spirit of Divine charity to God and to one another, animating and regulating all. This is always the great reality in spiritual life. Externals are accidentals.

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Blosius reminds us of the old Scriptural truth that "God, who is present everywhere, is singularly present in the human soul."‡

We admire the Divine presence and power in all the wonderful works of nature and grace. Let us see God, let us love and serve Him in our fellow-creatures. There, in the human soul, we see the Divine image, the Divine presence, the Divine grace and love. "The kingdom of God is within you." God desires to reign within the souls of men. He has made them like to Himself, that He may possess them, and give Himself wholly to them. We are all made for this end together. Should we not go from earth to heaven, loving and helping one another—the

\* "non quantum—sed ex quanto."

† B. I, C. xv.

‡ Instit. Sp., C. 3.

sovereign love of God governing and regulating all?

Charity does not cause the loss of charity. And so if a soul lives with God within, it must not think it a losing game to go forth to outer works, and attend lovingly to the needs of others.

The Divine fire wants kindling upon the earth. We must love our neighbour as ourselves. As for ourselves we form the Divine habit of love within, and let it gather strength, and extend itself in all the toils and trials of life, so let us work that others too may share this blessed life. This seems to be the way to love our neighbour as we do ourselves. So we learn from S. Augustine. \*

The principle of Divine love entering into our ordinary actions animates them with Divine life and spirit. It gives God Himself entrance into our works. God and the soul live and work together. What can be better and happier for a creature than this? How can we expect to succeed in our works if we work alone? Is not God the only good? What power of good have we apart from Him? If without Him we can do nothing, even of a natural sort, how can we expect to succeed in the work of souls (which is so Divine a work) unless we keep ourselves in dependence on Him? Indeed, we ought to be in close touch with Him. For He is ever the principal worker. *Deus est agens principale.* Hence, our Lord says, "Abide in Me, and I in you: as the branch cannot bear fruit unless it abide in the vine, so neither can you unless you

\* de Doct. Christ., Lib. i., C. 22.

abide in Me. For without Me you can do nothing."\* This is why the formation of the habit of charity is ever our principal work, because it brings the soul to the union of love with God, by means of which God and the soul live and work together.

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Let us take care not to offer the blind and the lame to God. "If you offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? And if you offer the lame and the sick, is it not evil? Offer it thy prince, if he will be pleased with it, or if he will regard thy face, saith the Lord of Hosts."†

If we look a little at our ordinary daily actions, even including those the most Divine, such as the Mass, the administration or reception of the Sacraments, the Divine Office, mental and vocal prayer, the care of souls—must it not be said that many of them are blind, lame, and sick? How little we see and realize the beauty of the Divine presence, the Divine wisdom, love, and service in all around us! And as our spiritual eye is not well opened, our views and our modes of action are human and imperfect. How often a chosen soul goes through Divine things with little or no interest! It is full of spirit in visiting a friend, or playing a game. Yet here is our Lord for ever in our midst, and we are His coadjutors and vicegerents on earth. He waits to give Himself to us in Holy Mass. Are we on the alert—delighted to go forth and meet Him? Do we rejoice to say Mass—to assist at Mass—to serve Mass—the greatest act on earth—to

\* S. John xv. 4, 5.    † Malac. i. 8.

have everything about the altar well prepared, bright, clean, punctually attended to, as befitting our Heavenly Lord, Master, and King, delighting to be associated with Him in His perpetual oblation for God's own great ends and the vast needs of souls? Then, the Divine Office—the *opus Dei*—the work of God going on daily in the Church. Are we full of inward life and spirit as we say it, standing in the choir and sending up our praises and petitions to heaven as the mouthpiece of the Church, in close union with our Lord in His sacramental life, in union with our Blessed Lady, with the Angels and Saints, holy souls, and faithful, loving souls on earth—just as in Holy Mass, for God's own great ends and the vast needs of souls? If we are but half-hearted in the discharge of these most Divine things, must it not be said that we offer the lame and the sick to God?

Again, are we not invited daily by the Divine Friend and Lover of our souls, to sit at His feet in mental prayer, to listen to Him, learn of Him, speak to Him, receive His Divine communications of light, love, peace, joy, and strength, by which to strengthen our inmost resources, and dispose ourselves to work successfully for God and for souls? Yet, with many, their appetite for these Divine things is but small. What can be the matter? Their spiritual constitution is weak. They can take but little of this heavenly nourishment, and can hardly retain even that. But for reading and talking of worldly things, plenty of spirit and interest are found. They offer the sick and the lame to God.

Then, here are souls waiting to be led to God.



They want knowledge, guidance, and the Christ-like, God-like life to look to. "Woe to the shepherds of Isreal who fed themselves. Should not the flocks be fed by the shepherds? The weak you have not strengthened, and that which was sick you have not healed, that which was broken you have not bound up, and that which was driven away you have not brought again; neither have you sought that which was lost: but you ruled over them with rigour and with a high hand. My sheep have wandered, and my flocks were scattered, and there was none that sought them."\*

The study of the Holy Scriptures, of the Fathers and Doctors, and science of the Church, and the governance of the Divine instead of the human spirit, are needed for the service of souls, seeing that God Himself is the principal Worker, and we work under Him, and therefore ought to be ever closely in His Hands. Why, then, are we not always with Him, sharing His Divine light, love, and strength, and labouring to bring others also to the Divine knowledge, love, and service? Why do we leave Him, and spend ourselves away on vain and fleeting things? Do we think of it, and realize it all? If not, are we not offering the blind to God?

And if, in seeking out poor, weak, and wandering souls, and bringing them to the care of the Good Shepherd, and pouring over them the merits of His precious blood in the Sacraments of the Church, we are backward and spiritless, or even heedless and neglectful, while our thoughts and hearts go readily and eagerly

\* Ezech. xxxiv. 2, 4, 6.

to idle pursuits and worldly pleasures, are we not offering the blind, and lame, and sick, all together to God?

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As the Spirit of God should govern us in all the more important things of life, such as the Divine works that appertain to the service of God and of souls, so also should we live and work with God in all the ordinary actions of daily life, each one in his own sphere and office :\* our aim being to work always for God, by the principle of His love, and according to Him.† This would give perfection to our actions. This would make the theories in our books become facts in our lives. We cannot accomplish it all at once, seeing that the work of perfection is a gradual and lifelong work. But we may tend to it, and aim at it, and try it, day by day. Little by little, we improve ; and things that are difficult at first, by practice become easy and pleasant. So it is in nature, and so it is grace.

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“All things must be subdued to Him, that God may be all in all.”‡ The true greatness of the creature is to be found in its subjection to the Creator. We enjoy vastly the good things of God around us—the glowing sun, the bright

\* “Ut cuncta nostra operatio a Te semper incipiat, et per Te caepta finiatur.”

† pro Deo, per Deum, secundum Deum.

“Ut qui sine Te esse non possumus, secundum Te vivere valeamus.”

‡ 1 Cor. xv. 28.

air, mountains and lakes, the hills and fields, flowers and fruits, science, literature, art, and the presence and love of dear friends. But do we not forget the love of the Giver in the enjoyment of His gifts? We must look to the end. We have not been made for creatures. We have not been made for ourselves. God has the treasures of His own light, love, life, and happiness to pour into our souls. But for all this we must be subdued to Him, that He may live in us. Here we see the design of suffering. It goes against our natural life. It puts down our selfish will and love. These keep us at a distance from God—out of proportion to Him—unfit for Him—unable to unite with Him: as Blossius says, "It cannot be that the soul should attain to intimate union with God, unless it become wholly pure, simple, and like to Him."\* "God is One and most Simple; therefore the soul, to unite with Him, must be one and most simple also."†

What, then, must be done? "We must die, that God may live in us," says S. Francis of Sales. ‡ Suffering it is that slays our self-love. Is it not a friend in disguise? Does it not deprive us of our own will to give us the Divine Will? Does it not displace our self-love to make room for the Divine love? Is not all this a little of the breaking down of the wall of partition that separates us from God? The thought of this brings us contentment, and even joy in our sufferings; and while we are not obliged to love them, we may love to endure

\* Instit. Spir., C. 12, § 3. † Card. Bona, "Manuduc.," fin.

‡ Confer., 20.

them, as S. Augustine says : \* since " We make it our joy to please God," † and " love makes all that is bitter sweet and savoury." ‡ Thus, we may find and enjoy the Divine will, love, and service in our sufferings, and offer them all in union with our Lord, and with so many faithful souls, for God's own great ends, and the vast needs of the Church and of the world.

When death comes, let us remember that it is the *gate of life*.

It has been well said, that no one can do a better thing in this world than get well out of it. §

" Thy treasures wait thee in the far-off skies,  
And Death, thy friend, will give them all to thee."

\* S. Aug., Conf., x. 28.

† S. Teresa, Exclam., 2.

‡ Imit. B., 3, C. 5.

§ Card. Manning.



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